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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #1811/01 1762008
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 242008Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8755
INFO RUEHHD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001811

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR GG UP RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ANALYST WARNS OF CONSEQUENCES IF UKRAINE JOINS NATO, SAYS RUSSIANS BELIEVE U.S. HAS HIDDEN AGENDA

REF: MOSCOW 1714

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Daniel A. Russell for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Dmitriy Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Center told NSC Senior Director for Russia Mary Warlick and EUR/RUS Office Director Ian Kelly on June 19 that there was nothing the U.S. could do to convince Russia to accept Ukrainian membership in NATO. He thought that the GOR could abide by the Finlandization of Ukraine and Georgia, with both countries politically close to the West while remaining outside the alliance. Trenin warned that NATO membership would exacerbate domestic divisions in Ukraine and could result in the violent secession of Crimea. He thought Moscow hoped to use possible economic consequences to deter Ukraine from this course, while also taking advantage of the Yushchenko-Tymoshenko rivalry. For Georgia, Moscow held out the reintegration of Abkhazia in exchange for Tbilisi staying out of NATO. Trenin spoke of Russians' deep mistrust of the U.S., which stemmed from American policies seemingly directed at Russia and Russians' inflated sense of their country's importance. Trenin argued that NATO membership had emboldened anti-Russian sentiment in Eastern Europe and tipped the balance in the alliance against countries sympathetic to Russian concerns. He thought the Putin-Medvedev transition had gone smoothly, with Putin taking on the role of Russia's "elder statesman." Medvedev's focus on the rule of law stemmed from the fact that the country had become so corrupt as to be "ungovernable," as well as popular demand that the issue be addressed. End summary.

Russia Will Not Accept NATO Membership for Ukraine

¶2. C) Moscow Carnegie Center analyst Dmitriy Trenin told NSC Senior Director for Russia Warlick and EUR/RUS Office Director Kelly that there was nothing the U.S. could do to diminish Russian opposition to Ukraine joining NATO - no deals on missile defense or quid pro quo could change the GOR's position. He believed the proposal Medvedev made in Berlin for a new European security treaty was meant to highlight GOR "frustration" with Euro-Atlantic policy towards Russia (reftel). Trenin thought Medvedev intended not to call into question the legitimacy of the trans-Atlantic relationship, but draw attention to Russian concern over potential NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia.

¶3. (C) Trenin explained that as much as Russia opposed NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, the GOR "abhorred" the thought of any kind of confrontation with the West, which would draw attention and resources from its preferred domestic and foreign policy agendas. Despite this fear, offering MAP to Ukraine would compel Russia to "repulse this massive encroachment" on its interests. Trenin speculated that the GOR could "tolerate" Ukraine and Georgia operating as Finland did - in the EU and pro-Western, but not in NATO.

Ukraine: Unstable and Unpredictable

¶4. (C) Trenin warned that NATO membership for Ukraine was a "looming crisis," particularly as the country's domestic situation remained highly unstable and unpredictable. He expressed considerable concern over the lack of consensus on the issue of NATO membership in Ukraine, where western Ukrainians saw Russia as a historic aggressor, while a large number of Ukrainians saw Russia more benignly: "a separate country, but not a foreign country," in Trenin's words. Should Ukraine pursue NATO membership, Trenin feared that this divide would widen and lead to violence. He thought Crimea could follow the precedent of Kosovo, where an ethnic minority seceded with the assistance of a powerful sponsor. In Crimea, the GOR would not formally support secession, but sympathizers among the Russian military contingent could easily "leak" weapons to Russian-speaking separatists. For Russian nationalists, such a situation would be a "godsend," allowing Russia to assert itself militarily. For the GOR, however, the situation could spiral out of control. Trenin thought such an outcome unlikely in Georgia, where the GOR had greater control and no fear of rogue Russian military supporting Abkhazia against Tbilisi.

Russia Hopes to Deter Ukraine

¶5. (C) Trenin was not sure if the GOR had a real strategy on Ukraine, but believed Moscow hoped to deter Ukraine from seeking NATO membership by threatening economic repercussions and a strict visa regime. The GOR also hoped to take

advantage of the Yushchenko-Tymoshenko rivalry. Trenin argued that Moscow saw Tymoshenko as more malleable and less anti-Russian, wanting the presidency more than NATO membership. To succeed politically, she needed to discuss gas prices with Moscow, which could use this lever to influence the PM's stance on NATO.

Georgia Can Have Abkhazia but not NATO

¶6. (C) Trenin said that Russia's message to Georgians was that they could have their country whole if they did not join NATO, otherwise Russia would not support reconciliation with Abkhazia. Trenin thought Medvedev brought a new element to Russia-Georgia relations, which had been "poisoned" by Putin's stormy relationship with Saakashvili. During their recent meeting in St. Petersburg, Medvedev even proposed to Saakashvili that Russia and Georgia settle the Abkhaz dispute "between the two of us," without the U.S. Ultimately, however, Trenin thought Georgia was a "sideshow" for Russia, while Ukraine remained a "visceral issue."

Russians Believe U.S. Has a "Hidden Agenda"

¶7. (C) Trenin explained that Russia did not see Europe as a military threat, but was still not sure about the U.S., the only country that had the ability to harm Russia when it was weak militarily. The GOR viewed NATO as a "platform" for the U.S. to "expand" against Russia should it wish to do so. For Trenin, this was the real problem with initiatives such as missile defense, which raised questions about the U.S.' real intentions. Trenin argued that average Russians believed the U.S. had a hidden agenda, "so hidden that we don't see it," which caused "tremendous distrust." He blamed this mindset both on U.S. actions and Russians' "inflated sense" of their country's importance. They see Russia as the only country that could prevent the U.S. from ruling the world, which makes it a natural American target. Trenin said Russians really do believe the U.S. wants to seize their country's natural resources. Politically, this results in the GOR frequently misreading U.S. security and intelligence initiatives, even those directed at terrorists, as somehow directed at Russia.

¶ 8. (C) Trenin dismissed the idea that NATO membership helped "moderate" the anti-Russian sentiments of the USSR's former satellite states. He explained that after the first wave of NATO expansion in the 1990s, some Russians hoped NATO membership could temper the "anti-Russia phobias" of Eastern Europeans, but believed instead that NATO membership simply "emboldened" countries to revisit the history of WWII and the postwar period. Politically, the GOR saw NATO and EU expansion shift the balance of opinion against Russia in both institutions. This was most acute in the EU, where the new Eastern European members counterbalanced Italy, Germany and France, which were more prone to understand Russian concerns.

Smooth Political Transition

¶ 9. (C) Trenin thought the transition from a Putin to Medvedev presidency was surprisingly smooth considering the tension among Kremlin clans and potential for dispute. He saw a "balance forming" between the President and PM, with Medvedev attempting to demonstrate he was the real President by performing the role of Commander in Chief: Medvedev visited military bases, presided over the Victory Day parade, and held regular Security Council meetings. Putin, meanwhile, played his natural role as Russia's "elder statesman."

¶ 10. (C) Trenin said Medvedev's political priorities, consolidating Russia's economic development and instituting the rule of law, were closely linked. Corruption made the country "ungovernable," while Russia had become "sophisticated enough" for its citizenry to demand the implementation of real rule of law. Medvedev hoped to accomplish this, in part, by making the courts more functional and independent at the mid-level, while the Kremlin would retain the ability to dictate to the courts when necessary. Trenin believed there was no need to limit state corporations, which were actually the "personal fiefdoms" of whichever government figures controlled them, and not actual state property.

RUSSELL